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Devastating floods reinforce need for urgent action on climate change, says AMA

Recent floods have tragically highlighted climate change dangers and added urgency for more to be done to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change, the Australian Medical Association (AMA) said today.

AMA President Dr Omar Khorshid said the widespread devastating floods in Queensland and New South Wales and the lasting impacts of the 2019-20 bushfires were more proof that climate change is increasingly impacting the lives of millions of Australians and is directly affecting people's health.

"Direct and indirect health impacts of floods in NSW and Queensland include community mental impacts, risks of gastrointestinal infections from tainted and unsafe drinking water, drownings, rising risks of contracting COVID-19, and of course the impacts of a lack of access to medications and medical services experienced by displaced communities," Dr Khorshid said.

The IPCC this week released its sixth assessment report on climate change, highlighting slow responses or the inability of governments and institutions to effectively respond to climate change impacts and events.

"More needs to be done to meet the challenges of climate change. There are practical and tangible things Australia must do to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change," Dr Khorshid said.

"Comprehensive short and long-term planning is needed and preventative and anticipatory action is required over a reactive approach to climate change events.

"As doctors we see and understand health threats posed by climate change and Australians are experiencing these impacts on an increasingly regular basis."

Dr Khorshid said the AMA has called for immediate practical action, across the economy and including the healthcare sector, to start tackling climate change while graphic images of the devastating floods are demanding public attention.

"We all need to do our bit to address this challenge. In healthcare, we want to see the development of a national Sustainable Health Unit to co-ordinate efforts to reduce emissions and increase the sustainability of the health sector, which contributes seven per cent of Australia's carbon footprint.

"Events such as these devastating floods demonstrate that there is a real human cost to a changing climate. It should not be left to communities to respond to these events alone. We need a unified national approach to mitigation, preparedness and response to climate change events," Dr Khorshid said.

Doctors Health Service has a telehealth service specifically for doctors and medical students who are struggling with their mental health during crises. This is a 24/7, free and confidential service - call 1300 374377.

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